

JOHN — WEEK 17

PASSIONATE OBEDIENCE



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is *Ecce Homo (Behold the Man)* by Caravaggio

In this section, we see many people who don't believe, but some who do, even some in authority. But they're cowed into silence, which is a great failing. A public confession of faith is essential.

We also see Jesus giving some interesting details about His incarnation. His passion never fails.

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T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

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1 John 12:37–41

But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke:

*“Lord, who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”*

Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

*“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
Lest they should see with their eyes,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”*

These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

The first quote is from Isaiah 53:1; the second is from Isaiah 6:10. They’re too long to include here, but click on the links below to read all of Isaiah 6 and 53. They’ll make your hair stand on end.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=is+6&version=NKJV>

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=is+53&version=NKJV>

Right after the second quote above (from Isaiah 6:10) comes a particularly chilling dialogue.

Then I said, “Lord, how long?”

And He answered:

*“Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant,
The houses are without a man,
The land is utterly desolate,
The LORD has removed men far away,
And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.” — Isaiah 6:11–12*

This isn’t about some enemy nation; it’s about Israel. Israel is to be made *utterly desolate*. And why?

He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.

This chills me because it feels like the path our nation is on right now. Some of the things going on aren’t just wrong; they’re crazy wrong. It’s hard to imagine how people could believe some of the bizarre ideas that have become popular.

Only *blinded eyes and hardened hearts* could produce such nonsense.

2 John 12:42–43 (ESV)

Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

The authorities? The authorities are afraid of the Pharisees? If they're such cowards, how did they get to be in positions of authority? What exactly do they have authority over anyway, if not even their own actions? Who has authority over them?

Notice that John answers the last question. These “authorities” are governed by their desire to be popular. *They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

This leads to a tough and blunt question. If someone believes in Jesus, but is cowed into total silence by peer pressure, is that person saved?

The answer is a flat, “No.” This is key to what it means to confess Christ.

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. — Romans 10:9 (ESV)

The teaching is absolutely clear; you must make a public confession of faith. Every church requires it.

This is why.

But in America, getting up in front of a church full of believers and making a public confession of faith carries no risk and no cost. You can still keep your faith a secret in public. So, is that okay?

The answer isn't as simple as whether a public confession is needed at all. However, given that there is virtually no cost in our society to being known as a Christian, why hide it?

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. — Romans 1:16 (ESV)

Are we ashamed of the gospel? Are there forces in our society that pressure us to be ashamed of it?

Maybe, and most definitely yes. The cancel culture is perfectly opposed to the gospel.

In modern America, peer pressure is the enemy's best weapon. We're protected against physical persecution (for the moment), but emotional persecution has reached a fever pitch. Frankly, it's a brilliant strategy.

But it's not new. Paul wrote about it in Romans 1:16 because it was an important issue at that time.

The glory that comes from man is devoid of any real glory.

3 John 12:44–46 (NIV)

Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

Remember also how God’s name is important? This is a bit like that.

Remember how John the Baptist kept insisting that he wasn’t the one, but he was heralding the one who is to come? This is a bit like that too. Consider these related verses.

who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, — Hebrews 1:3

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. — Luke 9:28–29 (NIV)

But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” — Exodus 33:20 (NIV)

There’s no way we’re going to fully understand what incarnation is (in the life anyways), but it’s a lot more than a road trip. The incarnate Jesus is, as Hebrews 1:3 says, “*the express image of His person.*” The English word “*image*” cannot possibly cover the full meaning of incarnation.

There a word in mathematics that might come closer—mapping. It refers to how something is different in different realms and how to map (or translate) from one to the other. A mapping is sometimes called an image. That can’t possibly cover the full meaning of incarnation either, but it’s an interesting way to think about it. All ways are futile though, and that is, in itself, an important lesson.

Just as God’s name is to be revered because it represents God, Jesus is to be revered as *the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.*

All this supports the main point of this passage. *Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.*

It’s a package deal. You don’t get one without the other. They’re not even really separate.

Another term used to describe incarnation is “condescended.” While this is a pejorative term when referring to human actions, it’s literal when referring to Christ. He gave something up while incarnate.

*He left His Father’s throne above—
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam’s Helpless race: — “And Can It Be” 1738, Charles Wesley*

4 John 12:47–50

And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”

This passage adds two interesting details about the incarnation mission. First, *I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.*

Note what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say that the world won't be judged, nor that He won't do the judging. He just says that's not why He came.

Then He says, *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.”* This feels like the judgment will be a natural process, instead of a hearing before a judge.

This is yet another thing beyond our comprehension. However, some popular Christian literature describes our end in terms of natural processes—such as how walking away from God leads to ending up separated from God.

In *The Great Divorce*, CS Lewis depicts a wondrous bus ride from Hell to Heaven. Amazingly, most of the passengers choose not to stay. They get back on the bus for the return trip. Lewis does a brilliant job of depicting the thought processes that lead to that seemingly impossible choice.

Second, Jesus expands on His condescension when He was incarnated. He gave up authority. He was just doing, and speaking, as the Father's instructed Him.

But in a fascinating twist, He will get authority back while still incarnate.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”
— Matthew 28:18

Don't miss all the implications of Matthew 28:18. We tend to think in positive terms—we're connected to the ultimate source of power and authority.

But if it has been given to Jesus, how much is left over for us?

That's right, none. We have no authority. Don't think of this just in terms of the power of prayer; consider our powerlessness. This extends beyond just our ability to do things. We lack the ability to know what to do. We have no power and no clue.

Pray without ceasing, — 1 Thessalonians 5:17

5 John 13:1

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

This curious aside by John summarizes the coming events from a heavenly, purpose-oriented point of view. Despite its placement in John's gospel before the events, it says, "*He loved them to the end,*" looking back on what is to come.

In other words, Jesus stuck it out all the way to the bitter end, and love was the glue that held it all together.

Okay, so why is this called "The Passion of the Christ"?

It's partly due to the teaching of this verse and partly due to the Latin roots for the word passion.

"Pati," means suffering or enduring. Thus "compassion" means to suffer with; truly compassionate people feel other people's pain.

Merriam-Webster lists "suffering" as an obsolete definition of passion, except when specifically referring to Christ. The word is now generally defined as emotion, love, devotion, or desire.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/passion>

Our Lord's passion is obviously inseparable from compassion and the obsolete definition, but as this verse shows, it's also inseparable from emotion, love, devotion and desire.

The Passion of the Christ fits all those definitions.

Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ" is one of the few depictions that does justice to the enormity of what our Lord endured. Roger Ebert's review gives it four stars but notes that it's the most violent movie he's ever seen. He thought it should even be rated NC-17, even though that rating had previously only been used for pornography. He's emphatic that young minds cannot handle it.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-passion-of-the-christ-2004>

I recommend reading the review. He explains many things, even some doctrinal issues, well. You'll then be prepared to decide whether to see the movie. Note: I suspect the movie would be more bearable on a small screen than in a movie theater.

I strongly recommend Dr. Frederick T. Zugibe's book, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Forensic Inquiry*. It explains, in detail, how crucifixion works. It also corrects a number of popular errors, such as that crucifixion involves death by suffocation.

Every single Christian should read that book. Every one.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What can we do to help heal our nation?
2. Where do you see pressure to hide your Christianity?
3. Do you have a favorite analogy to describe incarnation?
4. When do you feel most powerless and dependent on God?
5. Have you seen Gibson's movie or read Zugibe's book?

Items for prayer: